

Goodrich Silvertown Building  
1955 Pacific Avenue  
Tacoma  
Pierce County  
Washington

HABS No. WA-158

HABS  
WASH  
27-TACO  
4

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service, Western Region  
Department of the Interior  
San Francisco, California 94102

HABS  
WASH  
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# GOODRICH SILVERTOWN BUILDING

LOCATION: 1955 Pacific Avenue  
Tacoma, Pierce County, Washington

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1930

PRESENT OWNER: Washington State Department of Transportation

PRESENT USE: Vacant

SIGNIFICANCE: The Goodrich Silvertown Building is significant as an intact example of a type of commercial structure which combined the exuberance of the Art Deco architectural style with advanced construction technology to provide a functional space for servicing the booming automotive market which developed in the 1910s and 1920s. It bears witness to the transition in Tacoma from a rail-oriented transportation system to an automotive one. The Goodrich building also exhibits, in the use of space spanning bow trusses, the desire to create large unobstructed work areas for the servicing of motorized vehicles.

HISTORIAN: Shirley L. Courtois  
Seattle, Washington  
September 1983

PART I - HISTORICAL INFORMATION

HISTORIC NAME: Goodrich Silvertown Building

COMMON NAME: Sam's Tire Service

LOCATION: 1955 Pacific Avenue, Tacoma, Pierce County,  
Washington

Lots 8 through 12 and south 5' of Lot 7, Block 2003  
of Tacoma Land Company's Fourth Addition to the Plat  
of New Tacoma

UTM: 10 542790 5232180

Quad Name: Tacoma South

Scale: 1:24,000

PRESENT USE: Vacant; demolition projected for the end of  
September 1983

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1930; City of Tacoma building permit dated 18  
November 1930

ARCHITECT: William Mellema, Los Angeles

HISTORY:

The 1930 Goodrich Silvertown Building represents specific characteristics of commercial structures built during Tacoma's third phase of growth--essentially the period from the First World War to the onset of the Depression. It is, first, indicative of the change in orientation from dependence upon rail transport to the burgeoning automotive industry and its attendant services. Secondly, it exhibits the evolution from the essentially nineteenth-century building construction techniques, common to the warehouses which surround it, to a more modern technology which could provide large unobstructed interior spaces.

W.W. Pickerill, later president of the Tacoma Automobile Club, brought the first automobile to Tacoma in 1899. By 1906 an estimated 100 Tacoma residents owned one of the new conveyances, and in April of that year, the People's Store became the first business to use a motorized rather than horse-drawn vehicle for deliveries. Automobile registrations in Pierce County rose from an estimated 1,220 in 1911 to 19,849 in 1921; to 44,410 in 1931.

Fairly early on, a specialized automobile oriented streetscape emerged--an "auto row" along Tacoma Avenue. By the 1920s, dozens of auto dealers, service stations, body shops, accessory retailers, and parking garages were located throughout the city. Pacific Avenue, traditionally Tacoma's main thoroughfare, was no exception. Among other automotive businesses, the Pacific Goodrich Rubber Tire Company was located at 2302 Pacific Avenue. By 1930 the company decided to relocate to the corner of Pacific and 21st Street. Their tire sales and Service center opened there in 1931 and operated under the name Goodrich Silvertown Inc. at this location until 1949. Subsequent occupants were all tire dealers, and the building has continuously served its original function until its closure in 1983.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The Goodrich Silvertown Building is significant as an intact example of a type of commercial structure which combined the exuberance of the Art Deco architectural style with advanced construction technology to provide a functional space for servicing the booming automotive market.

The building retains both its structural and stylistic integrity, with only minor superficial alterations. It is part of a group of automotive-related buildings which developed in close proximity to older railroad-oriented buildings in the Union Depot and warehouse district. As such, they bear witness to the transition in transportation technology which took place during the early decades of this century. The Goodrich building also exhibits, in the use of space spanning bow trusses, the desire to create large unobstructed work areas needed for the servicing of motorized vehicles.

## PART II - ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

CONDITION OF FABRIC:      Excellent (to be demolished)

### SUMMARY DESCRIPTION:

The Goodrich Silvertown Building is a one-story automotive service building exhibiting many features of the Art Deco style. The smooth planar surfaces of its stuccoed exterior are broken by grooved pilasters and sparingly decorated with stylized floral ornament confined to small rectangular panels at the heads of these pilasters. Some additional emphasis is given to the upper portion of the wall by a horizontal band of simple ribbed design and by a narrower band of accordian folds on the parapet above the main entrance.

The restrained nature of the exterior ornament is in keeping with the utilitarian function of the interior space. An enormous unobstructed work area is provided by the use of five large wooden bow trusses spanning 105 feet. The straightforward character of the interior is further revealed in

the concrete slab floor, exposed brick walls, and industrial type metal sash windows. Only the office areas, with later additions of imitation wood paneling, acoustic-tiled false ceilings, and carpeted floors, add a discordant note to the honest declaration of industrial technology wedded to Art Deco design.

EXTERIOR:

Foundation: Reinforced concrete.

Wall Construction: Exterior walls are brick. The north, south and west elevations are finished in cement plaster; the east (rear) elevation has exposed brick and unfinished concrete, with impressions of formwork visible, on the partially above-grade basement level.

Openings, Doorways, Windows: The main (west) facade (photo 3) facing Pacific Avenue has two large access bays for autos, which are closed by means of three-panel track-hung doors. The upper two-thirds of each door is divided by muntins into multi-lights (now painted over); the lower third is a metal apron. Between these auto bays is a central entrance with large rectangular plate glass windows flanking an aluminum-framed glass door (not original). There is a single-light transom above the door and an upper transom of six lights spanning the full width of the entrance. A secondary entrance, of the same design but slightly narrower dimensions, is located at the north end of the west facade. At the southern end is a three-part window opening with industrial metal sash. Rectangular window openings in the north, south and east elevations also contain industrial sash. The east

(rear) elevation (photo 6) has a large auto access bay with sliding overhead door, and a small loading bay covered by a track-hung door. There is also a small pedestrian access door at the southern end of this east elevation.

Roof: The curved roof form seen from the exterior reflects the interior bow truss system. Exterior surfacing is roofing material which has been tarred. Framework for a now-gone billboard remains on the east side of the roof.

#### INTERIOR:

Structural System: Exterior brick bearing walls. Reinforced concrete columns in basement (with visible impressions of riveted steel wrappers) support reinforced concrete slab. Five large wooden bow trusses of 105' span are supported by 9" x 9" timber posts on the north and attached brick piers on the south wall (photos 9-12). X-bracing is provided at two points between each of the trusses.

Plan: Overall dimensions are 125' x 93'. The main floor is divided by an east-west row of heavy timber posts located 20' from the north wall. The major tire service area is an enormous unobstructed space that, when the building was in use, probably contained numerous pieces of both stationary and movable equipment. What remains now is the large service pit at the center rear, a concrete stairway at the southeast corner, utilitarian partition walls creating work spaces and storage areas, particularly at the rear. A loft space, reached by a wooden stairway, is located along a portion of the east wall. An upper level office, also reached by a simple wooden

stair, is located in the center of the north side of the service area (photo 12). An office area (approximately 20' x 40') seems to have been always located at the northwest corner of the building, with access provided by the secondary entrance on Pacific Avenue mentioned above. Modern interior wall and floor surfaces and a dropped ceiling obscure the original character of this space.

A partial basement is located beneath the southern third of the building. Access is by a concrete stairway in the southeast corner. Originally, auto access to the basement was provided by a ramp leading down from the entry bay on the east elevation. At some point this concrete ramp was removed and replaced by another leading up to the main floor service area. A small (approximately 15' x 15') boiler room is located at the basement level at the northeast corner. Access is by means of a trap door in the floor above and a short concrete stair.

Flooring: Concrete; some portions covered with linoleum and carpeting.

Wall and Ceiling Finish: Perimeter walls of exposed brick are painted. Partition walls are unfinished plywood, with some use of unpainted gypsum board. Office areas have imitation wood paneling. In the main service area, wide wooden decking is laid on the trusses. In the office areas there are false ceilings with modern acoustic tiles.

Doorways, Doors, and Windows: Doors of offices or restrooms are either standard paneled wood or hollow core with glass inserts. Windows are industrial type metal sash of 5 x 5 lights with the center six-hinged to open.



Interior Trim: Negligible.

Hardware: Standard.

#### SITE AND SURROUNDINGS:

The building is located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Pacific Avenue and South 21st Street, close to downtown Tacoma. It is just outside the boundary of the Union Depot/Warehouse Historic District. It faces Pacific Avenue, historically the city's main thoroughfare. A large concrete apron fronting the building on Pacific Avenue provided easy accessibility for automobile traffic. A brick-paved access road (unnamed) at the east and north sides of the building completely isolate it from the rest of the block.

#### PART III - BIBLIOGRAPHY

Historic American Engineering Record, Inventory of Tacoma Union Station Jobbing District, 1979. Available in Community Development Department, Municipal Building, Tacoma.

Polk's Directories for City of Tacoma.

Tacoma Daily Ledger, 11 February 1906.

Tacoma Daily Ledger, 29 April 1906.

Tacoma News Tribune, 12 January 1932.

#### PART IV - PROJECT INFORMATION

The Goodrich Silvertown Building is slated for demolition in late September 1983. Demolition is due to the imminent construction of I-705, the

Tacoma Spur connecting I-5 with downtown Tacoma. Agreement between the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (Region 10), the Washington State Department of Transportation, and the Washington State Historic Preservation Officer resulted in the preparation of this historical and descriptive documentation. These records were prepared during August and September 1983 by Shirley L. Courtois, Architectural Historian, Seattle, Washington.